

**APPLICATION FOR UNITED STATES
LETTERS PATENT**

**Methods and Systems for Communicating and Controlling
Facsimile Information**

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to methods and systems for communicating and controlling data in a network. More specifically, the invention relates to managing and
5 controlling incoming telephone calls to a network when subscribers to the network do not have multiple telephone lines in the network.

Description of the related art

With the current explosion of wireless technologies and the implementation of sophisticated wireless networks, new wireless services are constantly being offered to
10 wireless subscribers that allow the subscribers to take full advantage of advanced communications over the network. Many of these services require that a telephone call be placed to the subscriber so that the subscriber can access the service through the network. There has thus developed an acute need in the art for ways to manage these incoming telephone calls and ensure that the subscriber receives all of the services that he
15 or she has subscribed to and that are provided by the network.

Typically, a subscriber to a wireless network that is receiving services therefrom only has one line or telephone number through which it can access the network and receive services. However, it will be recognized that at any one time, more than one telephone call, including voice calls, may be attempting to contact the subscriber through
20 the network. Additionally, as service offerings proliferate in wireless networks, it is envisioned that more than one service may attempt to access the subscriber at any one time.

For example, the FAX machine has become a ubiquitous piece of equipment in the office environment. Most businesses and many home users employ FAX machines so that they can stay in communication with business associates, relatives and other people. In fact, FAX services have become an integral part of the plethora of Internet and
5 wireless services that are now available. In fact FAX services in the wireless environment are already readily available to subscribers and so the aforementioned problems have arisen.

Prior approaches to solving these problems have been proposed. For example, separate telephone lines apart from voice telephone lines may be provided to a subscriber
10 that wishes wireless access to FAX machines. However, this is an expensive solution especially when the network over which the FAX signals will be sent is a wireless network. Therefore, it may be desirable to allow FAX and voice signals to be sent over a single channel with one telephone number. In order to accomplish this goal, it will be appreciated that if the user is not available at the telephone, the FAX call may be missed,
15 or if the user is using the phone for voice communications, the FAX call will not go through. A method for overcoming these problems should therefore be devised.

Other prior art approaches to address these issues have relied on detecting a FAX versus a voice call and alerting the user when a FAX call is coming in. The alert may be in the form of a web page sent to the user. In the area of cordless phones which have
20 base units, when the base units include FAX machines the base units may be provided with functionality to differentiate the FAX call from the voice call without interrupting or otherwise alerting the user of the cordless phone. Voice and text storage systems also

exist in the art wherein text, such as a FAX, may be stored in a user's mailbox in the system.

None of the aforementioned solutions adequately provide methods and systems for FAX communications continuously to subscribers with only one telephone number for FAX and voice calls. Nor do these solutions automatically store and forward FAX transmissions to a subscriber over a single telephone line when the subscriber is occupying the line with a voice phone call. Moreover, the prior methods and systems for sending FAX signals over a single telephone line do not adequately identify FAX transmissions or alert the subscriber that a FAX has been or will be sent.

There thus exists a long-felt need for methods which store and forward incoming telephone calls when only a single telephone line is available for multiple incoming telephone calls. The methods and systems should identify whether the call is a voice call or some other type of call and notify the user that another type of call FAX has been received. Additionally, it would be desirable if the methods and systems automatically and continuously accepted incoming telephone calls even when the subscriber is using the single line for a voice call. These needs have not heretofore been achieved in the art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The aforementioned problems are solved, and long-felt needs met, by methods of managing multiple telephone calls in a network. In a preferred embodiment, the methods receive an incoming call having a first character for a subscriber to the network. It is then determined whether the incoming telephone call has the first character or a second character in order to classify the incoming telephone call. The call is then routed to a

location depending upon its classification as a telephone call of the first or second character.

Methods of routing telephone calls in a network also satisfy the aforementioned long-felt needs. Preferably, an incoming telephone call to the network is received that is intended for a subscriber to the network. The incoming call is classified as either a voice call or another type of call. If the call is classified as a voice call, it is routed to the subscriber. However, if the call is classified as another type of call, it is routed to another location. It may then be stored at the other location and forwarded to the subscriber at some future time.

The inventive methods are particularly useful for storing and forwarding of FAX and other incoming telephone calls to subscribers, especially when the subscriber has only a single line in the network. Advantageously, the methods allow automatic and continuous receipt of FAX messages even when the subscriber is using the single line for voice calls. This greatly reduces the costs to the subscriber for receiving FAX transmissions and allows the subscriber great versatility in using the network. Such results have not heretofore been achieved in the art.

These and other features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. It is to be understood, however, that the drawings are designed solely for purposes of illustration and not as a definition of the limits of the invention, for which reference should be made to the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings wherein like reference numerals refer to like elements throughout the several views thereof:

5 Figure 1 is a block diagram of a network which implements the inventive methods described herein; and

 Figure 2 is a flow chart of a preferred embodiment of the methods provided in accordance with the present invention which can be implemented in software.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

10 Referring now to Figure 1, a network 10 is depicted wherein incoming telephone calls can be managed and routed to a desired location depending on the nature and character of the calls as determined and classified by the inventive methods. The network 10 may be any type of computer network such as the Internet, the known switched telephone network, a wireless network, a local area network (LAN), a wide area
15 network (WAN) or other networks through which analog and/or digital communications may take place. For ease of description throughout, network 10 will be described as a wireless network.

 A subscriber 20 to wireless network 10 will communicate with the network 10 through a standard wireless device such as a mobile telephone, a personal or laptop
20 computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA) a beeper, a FAX machine, or any other device which is configured to transmit and receive wireless communications. This communication can be received by any communications device as will be described in more detail. Typically, subscriber 20 will only have one wireless telephone line to

network 10, but subscriber 20 may subscribe to more than one wireless line. Whether subscriber 20 has access to one or more lines to network 10, there will doubtless be times when all of the subscriber 20's lines are being occupied, or are otherwise in use such that an incoming call to the subscriber 20 through network 10 will not be able to be
5 completed.

This scenario will occur since many other parties and devices may try to contact subscriber 20 at the same time. For example, but not intending to limit the invention in any way, a standard landline telephone 20, a personal or laptop computer 40, a FAX machine 50, a wireless telephone 60, a beeper 70, a PDA (wireless or landline-based) 80,
10 or other devices may be used by others to try and contact subscriber 20 through network 10. Conventionally, a server 90 is associated with network 10 and provides the required functionality to run data and voice communications through network 10. There are many servers that are commercially available on the market today which are used to drive networks, for example, the PROLIANT server sold by Compaq Computer Corp.
15 (Houston, Texas) may be employed. Other servers are known to those skilled in the art which may also be used to run network 10.

As will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, the inventive methods may be implemented as a software program or programs, or in modules associated with a larger software program such as an operating system for network 10. The software may be
20 written in any appropriate software language such as C++, VISUALBASIC, or others, and may be implemented in any operating system environment such as UNIX, WINDOWS or other operating systems. In a preferred embodiment, server 90 runs the software to perform the inventive methods.

After an incoming call is received by the network 10 and the server 90 is notified thereof, it is desired to process the received call with a processing block for the received call which receives and processes data information associated with the received call. Then, the call is classified by a classification block 110 to determine the nature and character of the call so that it can be routed to the appropriate location. Once classification has taken place, routing module 120 routes the call to the appropriate location either in the network 10, to the subscriber 20, or to some other location outside the network 10.

The classified call can be routed to virtually any location desired, in or out of the network. For example, the call may be directly and immediately routed to subscriber 20. Further, the call may be routed to the subscriber's voice mail 130, to a storage area or device 140 or to any other appropriate location 150 which may later be contacted by the subscriber or others for retrieval or for other actions depending on the nature and/or character of the incoming call.

As has been mentioned above, the inventive methods may be implemented in software in the appropriate software language. Figure 2 depicts a flow diagram of a preferred embodiment of a method provided in accordance with the present invention. The method begins at step 160 and at step 170 an incoming call is received through the network. The call is classified at step 180 as having a first or second character. As used herein, the terms "nature" or "character" with respect to the incoming call means the type of call that is incoming to the network. For example, a first character may be a standard voice call. A second character may be a call from a FAX machine, beeper or other device as described in relation to Figure 1 above. Of course, there may second, third or

fourth, etc. character incoming calls which can be classified by the inventive methods and ultimately routed to a location in the network. The invention is not limited to the number or incoming call characters, and the description of Figure 2 with respect to incoming calls having one of two characters is simply exemplary for illustrative purposes. It will be
5 further appreciated by those skilled in the art that the call characters are programmed in the software and may be added, deleted or modified at any time by the server 90 managers to accommodate the desired architecture of the network 10.

It is then preferably determined at step 190 whether the incoming call is of the first character. If so, then at step 200 the call is routed directly to the subscriber. If not,
10 then at step 210 the call is routed to the subscriber's voice mail on the network for storage or other action. In this scenario, the call has a second character, for example it is determined to be a FAX machine call, and the first character is a voice mail call. However, it will be further appreciated that these calls may have different characters and may therefore be routed to other locations.

15 In any event, the method then proceeds to step 220 where it is determined whether there are other incoming calls to the network that must be routed and classified in accordance with the present invention. If so, then the method proceeds back to step 170 for further processing. If not, then the method stops at step 230.

Classification of the character of the incoming call and/or determination of the
20 type of call can occur in several ways. For example, it is known that each of the subscribers to the network are assigned a mobile identification number (MIN) when the network is a wireless network. When an incoming call is received at the network, the network then determines whether the subscriber identified by the MIN has the feature

activated that is associated with the character to be determined. For example, if the subscriber desires that FAX transmissions be routed to his or her voice mail, then this option is activated and the system will route FAX transmissions to voice mail after the FAX character of the incoming call has been determined. The determination that the incoming call is a FAX call may be determined by detecting whether or not there are any tones associated with the FAX transmission in the incoming call. If these tones exist, then the call is determined to be a FAX transmission which is preferably automatically routed to voice mail. If no tones are present, the call may be assumed to be a voice call which is directly routed to the subscriber.

Even more preferably, after the FAX call is routed to voice mail, the system notifies the subscriber that a FAX has been received. This may be accomplished a number of ways. For example, the network may send a wireless communication to the subscriber that a FAX communication is in voice mail, or the network may institute a web page communication to the user that the FAX has been placed in voice mail. Moreover, the inventive methods may determine more than one characteristic about the incoming call, for example, how long the communication is, how many FAX pages are associated with the communication, the time and date of the communication, and other characteristics that may be of interest to the subscriber, the network or others. Additional features may also be added, for example, the inventive methods may be modified to allow the subscriber to dial into his or her voice mail to select and forward the communication to another location such as another FAX machine in or out of the network for printing.

Thus, the inventive methods store and forward FAX and other incoming telephone calls to subscribers of a network, especially when the subscriber has only a

single line in the network. This provides automatic and continuous receipt of FAX and other messages even when the subscriber is using the single line for voice calls. The inventive methods thereby greatly reduce the costs to the subscriber for receiving FAX transmissions and other message and allow the subscriber great versatility in using the
5 network. These results have not heretofore been achieved in the art.

While there have been shown and described and pointed out certain novel features of the present invention as applied to preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various omissions and substitutions and changes in the methods and apparatus described herein, and in their operation, may be
10 made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. It is expressly intended that all combinations of those elements and/or method steps which perform substantially the same function in substantially the same way to achieve the same results are within the scope of the invention. Substitutions of method steps and elements from one described embodiment to another are also fully intended and
15 contemplated. It is the intention, therefore, to be limited only as indicated by the scope of the claims appended hereto.